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ABSTRACT

This report examines the changes, and the potential consequences of those changes, in the employment patterns of American academics, focusing specifically on the use of short-term and temporary instructors by postsecondary institutions. Following a brief introduction, the report describes shifts in hiring patterns of postsecondary institutions, noting that 41.6 percent of all faculty at such institutions are now part-time. The next section details the differences between part- and full-time faculty, using economic and demographic data from the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty. The causes of the dramatic increase in part-time faculty are examined, and it is suggested that the expansion of community college programs has been the main contributing factor--although no one single factor explains the shift. The effects that the increased reliance on part-time instruction have had on the quality of education is described in the subsequent section, followed by a discussion of the attitudes of part-time faculty toward their work. The final sections of the report examine how the shift to part-time instructors has created changes in the nature of the academic profession that may be impacting the integrity of academic institutions. A list of Sloan Conference participants is appended. (Contains 16 references.) (MAB)

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Part-Time, Adjunct, and Temporary Faculty:

The New Majority?

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Report of the Sloan Conference on Part-Time and Adjunct Faculty.

May 1998

Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

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The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation sponsored a conference on the increasing use of part-time and adjunct faculty held on December 2-3, 1997, in Arlington, VA. Papers addressed the changing nature of work in American society, perspectives on academic careers, the characteristics and roles of part-time and adjunct faculty, causes and effects of increasingly "contingent" academic appointments, and the rationales of selected colleges and universities for their decisions and policies affecting part-time academic employment. Twenty six seminar participants included economists, students of faculty issues in higher education, policy-oriented researchers, practitioners such as presidents, provosts, and deans, and sociologists and psychologists who study work. While this report draws heavily on ideas and perspectives shared at the Sloan Conference, the author assumes full responsibility for its substance. Particular thanks are extended to Kathleen Christensen, Program Officer at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, for her thoughtful support in organizing and designing the conference. Judith M. Gappa, Joan S. Stark, and S. Anthony Foster were particularly thorough readers of this report in its early drafts. Participants in the conference are listed in Appendix A. Each of them deserves a special note of appreciation for their willingness to prepare so thoroughly and thoughtfully for the intensive presentations and discussions that enlivened the conference. Staff at The College of William and Mary provided essential professional support, in particular, Beth Stokes, administrative assistant to the Dean of the School of Education.

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Part-Time, Adjunct, and Temporary Faculty: The New Majority?

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1992, nearly forty-two percent of all college and university faculty teaching courses for credit were employed part-time, and a growing percentage of full-time faculty (15 percent) were not eligible for tenure[1] (Harper, 1998). Changes in the employment patterns of American academics have occurred far more quickly and substantially than has been commonly recognized -- and the potential consequences of these changes have yet to be clearly understood.

These changes and their results appear to follow from, among other things:

- Supply and demand imbalances in the academic work force,
- Developing patterns of work and employment unique to individual academic disciplines,
- Changes in the economic foundations and organization of American colleges and universities, and
- Large underlying shifts in patterns of work in American society.

The causes and effects of these trends were the subject of a seminar sponsored by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation on December 2 - 3, 1997. Seminar participants prepared analyses of these changes to address the following questions:

- Who are the "new" part-time, adjunct, and non-tenure track faculty?
- What are the trends in academic careers?

- Are patterns of part-time work in academe similar to or different from the same patterns in other sectors?
- How does the economic condition of higher education affect the academic work force?
- Is the use of part-timers and adjuncts supply driven or demand driven?
- Why do institutions elect to hire more part-time and adjunct faculty?
- What are the consequences for the production of knowledge? For the quality of teaching?

Is it in the nation's interest to convert a large proportion of academic work to short-term and temporary jobs

The answers to these questions will say a great deal about the current state of academe, but they will also say a great deal about the future of academic employment and its relationship to:

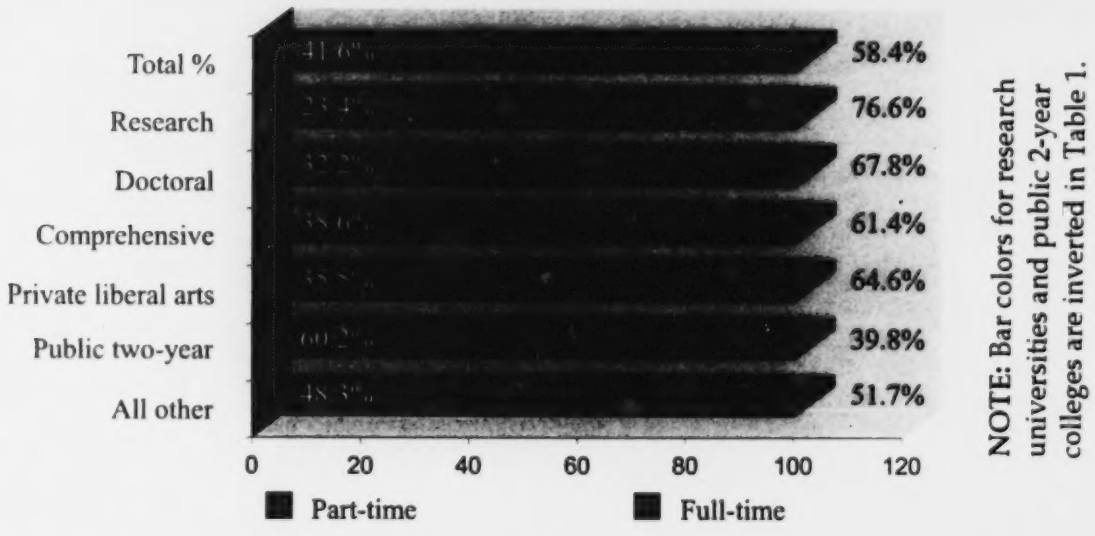
- Continuity and progress in the production and application of knowledge.
- The relative attractiveness of academic careers to people of talent.
- The quality and integrity of undergraduate and graduate education.
- The ability of colleges and universities to respond to their changing environments.
- The renewal of the nation's intellectual capital.
- And, in a broader sense, the nature and meaning of work and its relationship to the idea of careers in American culture.

Is it in the nation's interest to convert such a large proportion of academic work to short-term and temporary jobs and thereby to undercut the protections of tenure and perhaps weaken academic freedom? Can the answer be a simple "yes" or "no?"

Part-time and adjunct faculty: The new majority?

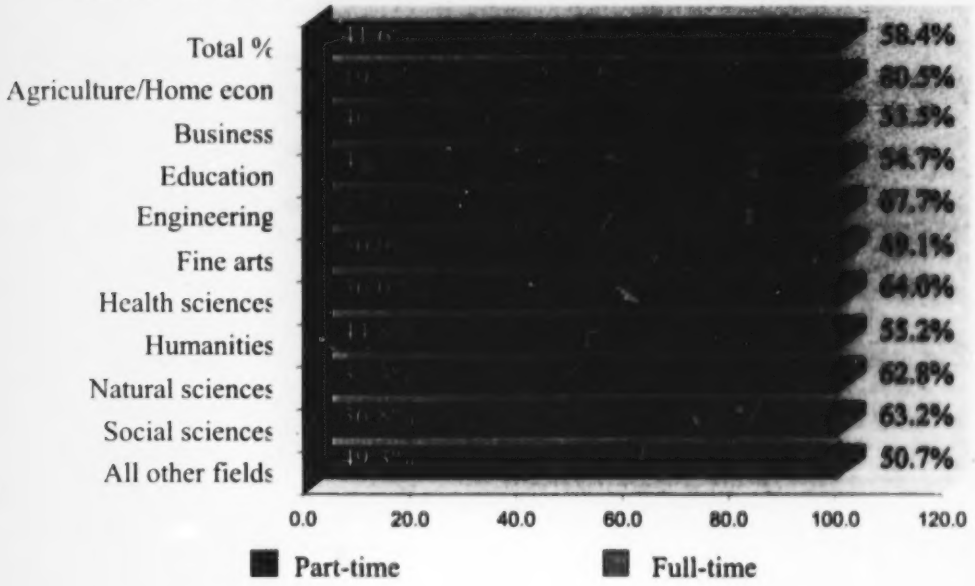
Where do the part-time and adjunct faculty teach and in what fields? Numbering over 376,000 (up from just over 250,000 in 1987), they teach in substantial numbers in all types of institutions (Kirshstein, Matheson, and Jing, 1997). Over 60% of faculty teaching courses at community colleges are part-time (Table 1). Research universities use proportionally far fewer part-time or adjunct faculty. (Adding the work of teaching assistants to that done by part-time faculty in research universities would probably show that proportionally as many undergraduates are being taught by other than full-time, tenure track faculty at those institutions as at some of the others.)

Table 1: Proportion of part-time faculty by institutional type
Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)



- *41.6% of all teaching faculty are part-time.*
- *Over 60% of community college faculty are part-time*
- *Very nearly half of all women faculty are part-time*

Table 2: Proportion of part-time faculty in each teaching field
Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)



Teaching fields differ dramatically in percentage of part-time faculty. Why should there be such high levels of part-time faculty in the arts and English and such low levels in agriculture and economics

The individual disciplines also use part-time and adjunct faculty in different proportions

Specific teaching fields in which 49% or more of the faculty were part-time included law (61.4%), fine arts (50.9%), English and literature (50.0%), computer sciences (49.5%) and mathematics and statistics (49.2%). ("All other" with 49.3% part-time faculty principally represents vocational fields taught mainly at community colleges.) Teaching fields with the lowest levels of part-time faculty included agriculture and home economics (19.5%), economics (23.7%), political science (24.7%), biological sciences (25.5%), and physical sciences (27.3%). These dramatic differences beg for further study of a disaggregated academic labor market -- discipline by discipline, much along the lines suggested by Burton Clark's "small worlds, different worlds" (1997).

How do part-time faculty differ from full-time faculty?

Who are the part-time faculty? They resemble full-time faculty far more than is commonly supposed. Most have middle class incomes, families, and well-paying full-time jobs.

- The mean age of part-time faculty who responded to the NSOPF in 1992 was 45.8 years, compared to 48.0 years for full-time faculty.
- Two thirds (63.7%) held full-time jobs elsewhere while teaching part-time.
- Mean **household income** of part-time faculty was $67,637, compared to $81,248 for full-time faculty.
- Individual part-time faculty were the principal income producers in their households, averaging $48,743 in total **individual income** from all sources. (Their pay from their teaching jobs averaged $10,180 per year.)
- Roughly three-quarters of both part-time (72.4%) and full-time (75.2%) faculty were married.
- Both groups lived in households of just under three members.

Part-time faculty typically have middle class incomes, families, and full-time jobs.

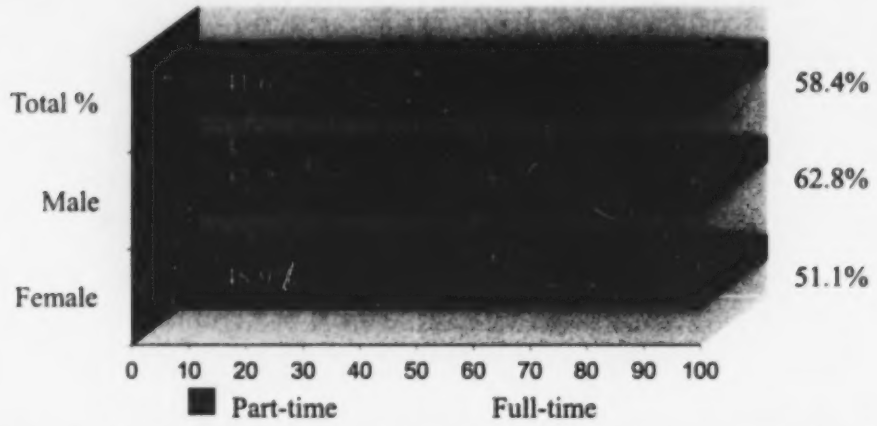
52% prefer to teach part-time

Women and men do not differ in their preference for part-time work.

Part-time faculty are individually committed (on average) to their employing institution; they have held their present teaching positions for an average of 6.3 years (vs. 11.2 years for full-time faculty). Part-time faculty differ from full-time faculty in two important respects. Most part-timers held a master's degree or less -- only about 15% held the doctorate and another 11% held the first professional degree.

Women faculty were substantially more likely to hold part-time or adjunct positions than were men faculty. Very nearly half of all women faculty were part-time, while close to two-thirds of male faculty were full-time (Table 3).

Table 3: Part or full-time status of men and women faculty
Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)



The majority of part-time and adjunct faculty (52%) reported that they "prefer" part-time teaching. A smaller proportion (43%) reported that they were teaching part-time because full-time jobs were not available.

Why are there more part-time and adjunct faculty?

Multiple "causes" are undoubtedly responsible for the dramatic increase in part-time and adjunct faculty. Has oversupply of doctorally prepared prospective faculty been a principal factor in the heavy reliance on part-time faculty? Is the increase a way for institutions to save money on faculty salaries? Is it a product of the uncapped retirement age? Supply and demand? The increase has clearly paralleled a rise in production of doctorates. Data from NSOPF suggest that oversupply is only one factor, and then only in some fields. In the fields that used the **highest proportion** (not including law), part-time faculty were less likely to hold the doctorate than part-time faculty in all fields taken together; in the fields that used the **lowest proportions** (not including agriculture/home economics -- apparently a unique case), part-time faculty were more likely to hold the doctorate than part-time faculty in all fields taken together.

This is the opposite of what one would expect if, in fact, there were a surplus of doctoral graduates queuing up for academic positions. When one considers that the large majority of part-time faculty are otherwise employed and that a majority prefer to teach part-time, it appears more likely that demand for teaching faculty is a stronger factor than oversupply of doctorates.

Multiple causes underlie increased use of part-time faculty.

Financial stress? The rise also paralleled increasing financial stress in many colleges and universities, particularly with the dramatic leveling off of state support for higher education in the early 1990's. Two of the papers prepared for the Sloan seminar (Haeger, Wyles) suggested that increasing enrollment without a commensurate rise in institutional income was indeed an important factor in reallocating faculty positions from full-time to part-time. These conditions made it harder to hire more full-time faculty, given the lower salaries paid to part-timers, the shorter time commitment to them, and the fact that part-timers mostly need not be paid benefits.

... demand for teaching faculty is a stronger factor than oversupply of Ph.D.'s

Aging of full-time faculty? Seminar participants questioned whether the aging and commensurate "tenuring in" of full-time faculty might have contributed to hiring more part-timers. The loss of control over mandatory retirement of full-time faculty, for example, may have forced institutions to limit offers of tenure to younger faculty.

On the whole, faculty were middle aged, whatever their status.

- The mean age of tenured faculty was 52, older than faculty on track (41.5), or not on track (44.7).
- Part-time faculty averaged 45.8 years, while full-time faculty averaged 48.0.
- The average age of full-time faculty who answered that they were very likely to retire within three years was 60.8 years.
- The very large majority of faculty plan to retire beginning at the age of 65.
- Just over 40% of those aged 55 - 64 indicated that they would be at least somewhat likely to retire in three years.
- Of those aged 65 - 70, 71.8% indicated that they would be at least somewhat likely to retire in three years.
- But of those 71 or older, a minuscule .8% of all full-time faculty, 41.2% reported that they were unlikely to retire in three years, so it appears that there is a bi-modal distribution with a very tiny number of older faculty interested in continuing past the traditional retirement age.

Financial stress forces institutions to reallocate positions from full-time to part-time.

While institutions may have been making long-term calculations about the effects of an uncapped retirement age, the data from the 1992 NSOPF did not indicate that this was an immediate, or even a short-term, crisis that might explain the relatively rapid increase in employment of part-time faculty. A similar conclusion was reached by Baldwin and Chronister (1996).

Full-time faculty doing more research, less teaching? If full-time faculty are doing more research and graduate teaching, and less undergraduate teaching, as is often alleged, part-time and temporary faculty may have been hired to take up the slack. Table 4 shows that full-time faculty, on the average, taught three courses per semester, mostly undergraduates, and generated more student credit hours per course taught (104.7) than part-time faculty did (77.4).

Table 4: Comparative undergraduate and graduate teaching loads. (Means)

	Total classroom credit hours	Total student credit hours	Total undergrad classes taught	Total graduate classes taught
Part-time	5.5	139.4	1.6	0.2
Full-time	9.1	293.1	2.3	0.5

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

Seminar participants did suggest that part-time faculty may be hired to help absorb increasing enrollments or to help develop new or changing programs. But there is no compelling evidence that full-time faculty have diverted their efforts away from undergraduate instruction and that part-timers have taken up the "slack."

Part-time faculty help absorb increased enrollment and start new programs; there is no evidence that part-time faculty are replacing full-time faculty who do research instead of teaching.

Do women prefer part-time teaching? The changing gender composition of the professoriate is sometimes offered as an explanation. Do women prefer part-time work arrangements more than men do? The data suggest they do not. Table 5 shows that among part-time faculty, just over half of both genders preferred part-time work -- the proportions being virtually the same.

Table 5: Gender preference for part-time work

	No	Yes
Male	47.1	52.9
Female	48.7	51.3

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

Do more "applied" majors hire more part-time faculty? Have shifts in enrollment from the traditional arts and sciences disciplines and into the more applied and professional fields -- with the accompanying need for clinical expertise -- been a factor? Seminar participants suggested that new professional programs may often be staffed by part-time faculty to hedge the risks involved. The evidence from the NSOPF survey is inconclusive on this point. Just under 45% of all full-time faculty taught in the traditional disciplines in humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences. Almost the same proportion (41.5%) of part-time faculty also taught in these disciplines. Just over 16% of all part-time faculty taught in one of the "other" fields -- principally occupational subjects mainly taught in the community colleges -- while 11.9% of full-time faculty did. Part-time faculty were employed proportionately more often than full-time faculty in fine arts, business, and education.

The pattern generally skews in the direction of the hypothesis, but is certainly not so marked as to imply any kind of causation.

Main effect: community college expansion. The expansion of enrollments and program offerings in community colleges have, in all likelihood, driven the rise in part-time faculty. "Over all, from 1970 to 1995, the number of faculty members at two-year institutions grew by 210 per cent, compared with 69 per cent at four-year institutions." (Schneider, 1998). Twenty years ago, just over one-half of all community college faculty were part-time; that figure had risen to 60% by 1992. Anecdotal accounts suggest that as many as 80% of teaching faculty at some community colleges are part-time (Selingo, 1998).

No one "cause." Undoubtedly, **there is no one single, simple explanation for the increase in the number of part-time and adjunct faculty in American colleges and universities**. The increase is clearly not uniform across all sectors of higher education -- patterns of faculty employment seem to be different in each sector, as Clark (1997) and Gumport (1997) have suggested. Apparently the various academic disciplines act as somewhat unique "labor markets," affected in different ways by changing enrollments, uneven production of doctorates among the different fields, the shifting emphasis on program content away from traditional disciplines and toward more applied studies, and many other issues.

Expansion in community colleges has driven the rise in part-time faculty.

Understanding faculty work may require disaggregation into the "small worlds" of the individual disciplines and the particular contexts -- the "different worlds" -- of the varied strata of institutions (Clark, 1997). Why should there be such high levels of part-time faculty in fine arts (50.9%) and English (50.0%) and such low levels in agriculture (19.5%) and economics (23.7%)? What is so different about these fields? Why do community colleges use so many part-time faculty and research universities so few? How, more precisely, do the micro-economics of these sub-markets work? When all of this evidence is boiled down, it appears that two factors do stand out above the others:

- Community colleges have expanded rapidly, and have employed large numbers of part-time and adjunct faculty to staff that expansion.
- Financial hard times and increased competition have forced colleges and universities to hedge on their commitments to long-term employment of full-time, tenure track faculty.

Less clear, but no less worrisome, is the apparent competition for prospective faculty with other employment opportunities in certain fields.

Effects on "Quality"

The effects of increasing reliance on part-time faculty raise important questions about the quality of higher education:

- Are too many part-time faculty "threatening the quality" of higher education?
- Are young people less willing to invest in academic careers, thereby shunting talent away from college teaching?
- Is the production of new knowledge -- the heart of the research enterprise -- likely to be attenuated as individual institutions gradually lose their critical mass of productive teams of full-time faculty?
- Are traditional institutions and patterns of faculty employment sustainable as "electronic virtual campuses" begin to compete with traditional institutions?

Quality can only be addressed indirectly. Gappa and Leslie (1993) found essentially "no difference" in quality of teaching between part-time and full-time faculty. Yet it is clear that part- and full-time faculty differ on many measures that might be proxies for quality. Table 6, for example, shows that full-time faculty are far more likely to hold the Ph.D.

Do part-time faculty affect quality? Part-time faculty are as committed and satisfied as full-time faculty. But they are less likely to hold the Ph.D. and spend little time on research. Both groups use similar teaching methods.

Table 6: Highest degree earned by ptf/ftf

%	Ph.D.	1st prof'l	Masters	Bachelors	Less than Bachelors
Part-time	16.0	10.7	51.6	17.0	4.7
Full-time	54.0	11.1	29.7	4.0	1.2

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

Yet, we know that part-time faculty are far more likely to be teaching in community colleges where only 19.1% of full-time faculty hold the doctorate or advanced professional degrees. They are also more likely to be teaching occupational or professional subjects in which the doctorate is either uncommon or simply not relevant.

The morale of part-time faculty may at least indirectly affect the effort they invest in their work. Their overall job satisfaction was high. Over 85% reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied, with their jobs on the whole. This was not different from the satisfaction level expressed by full-time faculty (84.1%). They were substantially less satisfied with benefits and job security, though, and this is clearly a cause for concern. Part-time faculty did not report spending a substantially different amount of time on "professional development" (5.8% vs. 4.6%) than full-time faculty. But they reported being more satisfied with their ability to keep up with developments in their field (67.9% vs. 48.3% for full-time faculty).

Is academic freedom at risk with the appointment of more part-timers who do not enjoy the protection of tenure? Ironically, the survey data show that part-time faculty were more likely than full-time faculty to say that the atmosphere for free expression on their campus had improved (by 36% to 22%). Relatively few of either group thought it had worsened. Similarly, 88% of both groups (part- and full-time faculty) reported that they would choose an academic career again. If the fundamental freedoms and attractiveness of the academic career are threatened by increasingly insecure job prospects, it was not clearly evident in the results of that survey.

These data suggest that part-time faculty are as engaged in and satisfied with their professional commitment as full-time faculty. While not direct measures of quality, the data seem to put to rest the contention that part-timers, on the whole, are alienated, demoralized, and/or disengaged from their work.

On the other hand, part-time faculty reported doing far less research, spending 7.1% of their time on it vs. 17.6% spent by full-time faculty. But part-time faculty are most likely to work in community colleges, where research is not expected of full-time faculty, either. Table 7 compares the proportion of time devoted respectively to research and teaching by full-time faculty at research universities and public two-year colleges. Research university faculty reported averaging close to 8 times as much of their work week on research as did faculty at two-year colleges. They are "different worlds," indeed.

Table 7: Research time vs. teaching time: Full-time faculty at research universities compared to full-time faculty at community colleges

	Time spent at research	Time spent at teaching
Mean %		
Research Universities	32.4	39.0
Public two-year colleges	4.5	68.7

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

Do part-time faculty add value by bringing more vivid examples and clinical experience to the classroom? While the NCES data do not allow a direct answer to this question, it is possible to compare teaching methods used by part-time and full-time faculty. Table 8 shows that about two-thirds of all faculty relied principally on lecture, and that part- and full-time faculty use other methods in about the same proportions. If health sciences are removed from Table 8, the differences in reliance on labs and internships practically disappear.

Table 8: Teaching methods, part-time faculty vs. full-time faculty

	Lecture	Seminar or discussion	labs or internship	Active learning
Total %	65.9	17.1	11	5.9
Full-or part-time employment at this institution				
Part-time	61.1	17.3	13.9	7.7
Full-time	69.4	17.0	8.9	4.7

Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)

These data suggest it is not possible to generalize about what kind of value part-time faculty add to the instructional program -- although they may well mask the contributions of individual faculty to specific courses.

Attitudes of part-time faculty.

While the global picture of part-time faculty is one of competence, high morale, and a healthy level of professional engagement, pockets of discontent do exist. The press, for example, continually reports on exploitation of part-time faculty and on their serious disaffection. A closer look at the basis for these impressions suggests issues that deserve further attention.

First, what are the feelings and attitudes of part-time faculty who report that they cannot find full-time work? Just over 65% of the part-time faculty in fine arts and 61% of those in the humanities reported teaching part-time because full-time work was not available. These are far higher percentages than in other fields, suggesting that too many potential faculty are chasing too few jobs in these fields. Almost a third (32.2%) of the part-timers in the humanities reported overall dissatisfaction with their jobs, as did 27% of those in the fine arts -- much higher than the overall levels of dissatisfaction among part-timers in all fields. So those who were most trapped in part-time work were also the least satisfied. And this pattern is clearly specific to the humanities -- there is some indication that employment patterns in the arts are too varied to permit as clear an inference (see Gappa and Leslie, 1993).

Exploitation exists and there is discontent among part-timers. Too many potential faculty are chasing too few jobs in the humanities and the arts. Those who are most trapped in part-time work are the least satisfied.

Part-time faculty and the changing academic profession.

The changes now observable in the American academic profession certainly challenge traditional assumptions. But higher education in the United States is no longer the growth industry it once was when it could depend on more of everything to cover the expansiveness of its ambitions and to sustain the remarkable value it added to society's fund of human capital (Breneman, 1997). It is a highly labor-intensive "industry." The cost of doing business in traditional ways has obviously outstripped the available resources (Rand, 1997). While demand for higher education has continued to rise and state appropriations have turned flat, institutions have been under public pressure to hold tuition increases within bounds. In short, something has to give, and that "something" has been traditional academic employment relationships and policies. The big question is whether turning over more teaching to faculty on short-term, part-time contracts will accomplish the dual goals of controlling cost and maintaining the quality of undergraduate education.

But other questions about the future of the academic profession arise, as well:

- Who will teach and how are they to be prepared?
- Is the Ph.D. the essential qualification for college and university faculty? Why?
- Are there too many Ph.D.'s seeking too few full-time jobs now?
- What kinds of rewards and incentives will attract and hold the best minds and most promising talents?
- If academe can no longer sustain full careers of scholarship, how will knowledge be produced and advanced?

A certain measure of altruism has always motivated college and university faculty because the financial rewards of teaching have generally been less than alternative employment. The 1992 NSOPF survey establishes that the intrinsic rewards of faculty work are high, and that the related satisfactions are a central attraction to academic careers.

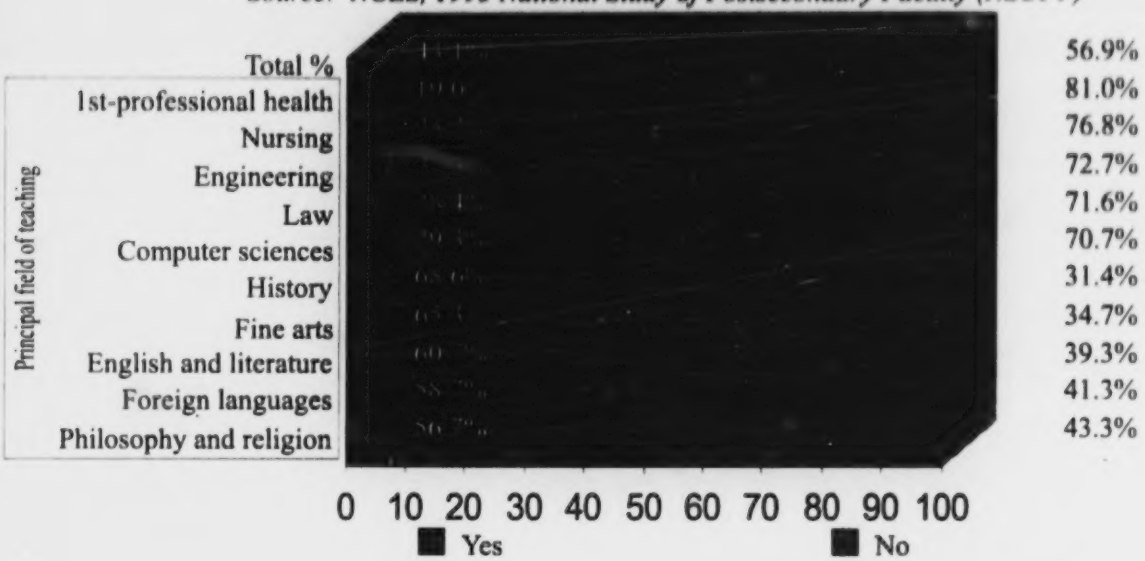
Rasell and Appelbaum (1997) estimated that "....the growth in part-time faculty likely exceeds the growth in non-standard work arrangements" in the economy as a whole -- considering trends in part-time, temporary, and self-employment jobs. They also report that workers in these jobs appear to have a relatively strong preference for such non-standard arrangements. Although higher education appears to be entering uncharted territory by relying so heavily on part-time, adjunct, and temporary faculty to do the basic job of teaching, it may simply be reflecting to some extent the changing norms of work and jobs in the broader economy. It is very unclear where these trends may lead and it is very unclear what the consequences of these trends might be for traditional institutions and for the various kinds of scholarly work they support.

Although higher education appears to be entering uncharted territory by relying so heavily on part-time, adjunct, and temporary faculty, it may simply be reflecting the changing norms of work and jobs in the broader economy

External pressures to use more part-time faculty. The pressures that have led to increasing use of part-time and adjunct faculty -- the "contingent" academic work force whose contracts are outside the traditional tenure system and whose employment is largely dependent on short-term needs of their institutions -- seem largely to be coming from outside the academy, and not from within it. Participants in the Sloan conference noted that higher education has become a "mature industry" with little room for expansion. And, although competition has therefore increased, there are few signs that productivity has improved -- as might be the case in the broader economy. Since productivity remains relatively flat, since cost increases (aging faculty, increased benefit costs, need for repair and replacement of facilities, cost of regulatory compliance, need to buy computers and retrofit campuses, etc.) continue at a time of flattening state appropriations, and since the public has shown signs of sensitivity to continued increases in tuition and fees, reliance on less expensive "labor" is perhaps the most direct way to keep expenditures under control. Salaries and wages are, after all, by far the largest part of college and university budgets.

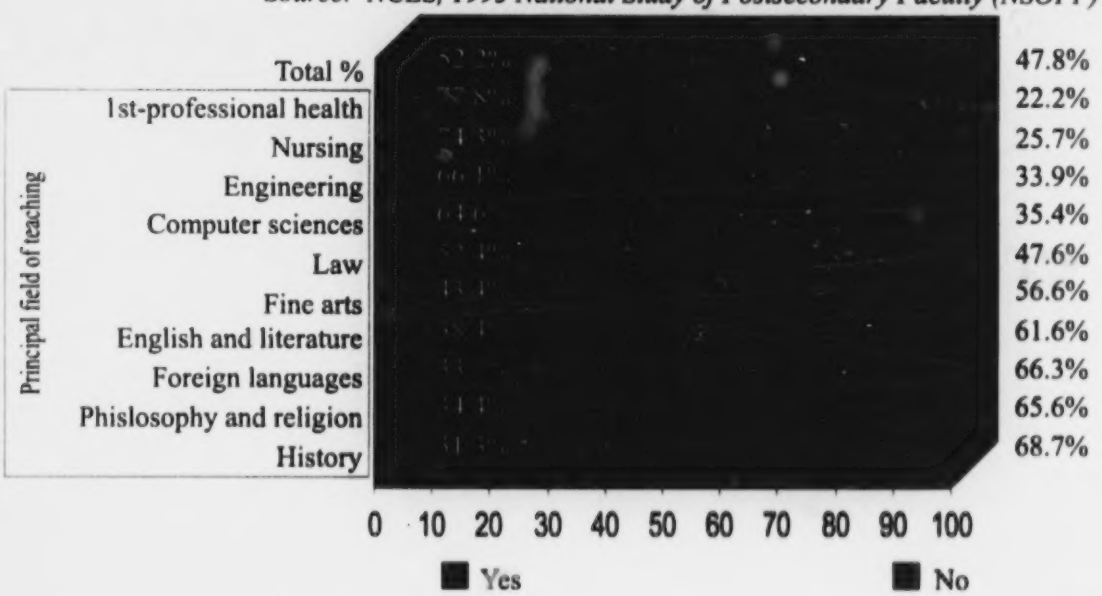
Supply and demand: Balanced or imbalanced? At the same time, there appear to be imbalances between supply of and demand for potential faculty among the varied disciplines. Arts and humanities part-time faculty responded at highest levels to the NSOPF survey that they taught part-time because they could not find full-time work. Those in health professions, engineering, law, and computer science responded at the lowest levels. (See Table 9.)

Table 9: Full-time work unavailable, by teaching field
Motive to teach part-time, by teaching field
Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)



In just the opposite proportions, as reported in Table 10, the same fields ranked highest and lowest when faculty reported "preferring" to teach part-time.

Table 10: Part-time work preferred by teaching field
Source: NCES, 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF)



These parallels are sufficiently dramatic to suggest that the economic state of the individual disciplines -- at least with respect to supply and demand -- affect the dynamics of employment far more than any overarching institutional strategy or policy. Competing job opportunities -- or lack of them -- appear to play a substantial role in whether people with appropriate qualifications are available and willing to teach part-time, and whether they do so voluntarily or involuntarily.

New patterns of sharing work and family responsibilities creates pressure for options in jobs and careers. The tenure system may be too rigid to accommodate the need for more options.

These data suggest a change in college or university teaching as a career path. They suggest an increasingly powerful differentiation of career paths among disciplines or professions, and serious disparities in the relative economic condition of those individual disciplines or professions. The large number of part-time faculty being paid low wages in some fields (either because there is an oversupply or because competing opportunities for full-time work pay well) may ultimately distort the entire salary and benefit structure of the "industry," but surely distort it in those fields that now rely heavily on part-timers.

Changing family roles and responsibilities. The dramatic entry of women to the academic profession in the short space of a generation or two may have had an impact, too. It is not clear that women prefer part-time work to full-time work -- the evidence appears to show that they do not. On the other hand, the reality that both genders increasingly share in work and family responsibilities may create pressure for options in jobs and careers that include non-standard work arrangements for everyone during parts of their lives. Academic jobs with their heavy pressure during tenure-earning phases may be too rigid to accommodate these new realities (Gappa, 1996; Gappa, 1997).

Competing job opportunities, or lack of them, play a substantial role in different of career paths among disciplines and professions..

The need to meet fluctuating student demand requires flexibility in faculty appointments.

Student enrollment patterns. Patterns of student enrollment and demand have shifted as new fields emerge and as those with a greater immediate payoff on the investment of tuition dollars become more attractive. Some of the more traditional arts and sciences disciplines have undoubtedly given up students (and economic strength) to more applied studies. The half-life of an academic career may be considerably shorter than it was when the tenure system was introduced in the 1940's, making institutions reluctant to commit to faculty in a discipline that may or may not enjoy a consistent demand (and enrollment) in 10 or 20 or 30 years. Logically, this kind of pressure would re-direct the appointment of faculty from tenure-earning to non-tenure track positions. Similarly, the need to meet fluctuating student demand as new kinds of work open up and different kinds of training are required argues for a high level of flexibility in faculty appointments.

So, changes outside academe's control may be increasingly influential in shaping incentives and career trajectories. Those changes seem to be overriding the customs, traditions, and patterns of faculty work -- and may continue to do so in ways that are as yet unforeseen. But it is now at least clear that studies of "faculty" employment ought to be disaggregated to take these forces into account and to accept their differential impact.

At the same time, Sloan conferees recognized a number of factors over which academic institutions may have more control -- but that also reinforce differentiation among disciplines. Studies of how work is divided up show that some disciplines (foreign languages and literature, for example) have gone so far as to create different departments based on whether instruction is basic -- say, in the French language -- or whether it is more advanced and theoretical -- say, in linguistics or literary theory (Tolbert, 1997).

Similarly, Sloan conferees who have tracked the production of doctorates note a substantial increase in recent years. Whether that production responds to market demand was a matter of debate. Overproduction in some areas and underproduction in others was seen as a serious problem, although of as yet unspecified dimensions. Perhaps a tighter connection between the number of doctorates and the demand for them in the marketplace might reduce production -- at least in some fields -- or redirect resources into fields where demand is stronger, in or out of academe. This is a difficult balance to strike, because institutions may see their graduate programs as both a source of prestige and of teaching assistants, and because predicting demand years in advance is a very imprecise art.

Part-time faculty and the integrity of academic institutions.

Changes in academic work force seem to be principally affected by external forces and by lagging responses on the part of colleges and universities.

Several generalizations emerged from the Sloan conference on part-time, adjunct, and temporary faculty. The academic work force is increasingly comprised of part-time and non-tenure track faculty. The proportion of these non-traditional faculty appears to be at a far higher level than workers in "non-standard arrangements" in other sectors of the economy -- marking higher education as an anomalous case, even in a time of remarkable change and instability in employment. These changes appear to be substantially affected by external forces in the economy and by lagging responses on the part of colleges and universities -- including a rigid time schedule and inflexible standards for awarding tenure. A large share of the escalating numbers of part-timers can be traced to increased staffing in community colleges, and to financial pressures to control the cost of salaries and benefits for full-time faculty.

Ironically, the effects do not appear -- on the whole -- to have diminished morale or professional commitment among part-time faculty. In part, this may be a result of changing preferences that favor part-time work and because non-academic opportunities in some fields are more attractive than tenure-track faculty jobs. Whether quality of instruction may differ if done by part-time faculty instead of tenured or tenure track faculty is hard to determine from existing evidence.

The supply and demand equations of the different disciplines show that demand for instructional faculty is strong overall. But pockets of oversupply are probably weakening the bargaining power and stature of present and prospective faculty in selected fields -- especially in the humanities and arts. In these fields, part-time faculty appear to be more affected by the economic realities and less satisfied with their working conditions. Disaffection and low morale in these fields need attention.

Is the increasing use of part-time and temporary faculty a cause or a symptom of profound changes buffeting American colleges and universities? The Sloan conference concluded with questions about higher education's value to society -- what is produced, at what cost, and for whom? If traditional degrees offered to traditional students on traditional campuses at unlimited cost is valued, then perhaps traditional faculty careers are sustainable. On the other hand, if society wants and needs just-in-time preparation for new careers at different stages in life without regard to physical location and at reasonable prices, then perhaps a more nimble and adaptable kind of institution is needed -- one in which the faculty may or may not hold traditional doctorates, may or may not be full-time employees of one institution, may or may not even be physically present in a particular place at a particular time.

Current employment arrangements for part-time faculty may or may not provide the kind of flexibility, creativity, adaptability, and efficiency that such an imagined institution would need. Part-time faculty in some fields report feeling exploited, insecure, and alienated.

Demand for instructional faculty is strong overall, but pockets of oversupply weaken the bargaining power of prospective faculty in some fields.

Can valid and effective academic programs grow and flourish with faculty who feel that way? The collegiate traditions of shared governance, of an integrated liberal arts curriculum, and of values that respect intellectual freedom may also be more difficult to preserve when the faculty is more fragmented and transient. Would it be better to reconsider the conditions under which all faculty work and to build opportunities that combine ways to make intellectual contributions -- clearly the most intrinsic motivator for most faculty -- with protections and rewards that allow good people to do so with enough security to make real lasting commitments?

Fairness and justice may be important questions, but this Sloan conference has made abundantly clear that the effectiveness and validity of the whole higher education enterprise is entangled in the question of what faculty do, how their work and careers are constructed, and whether they can achieve the ends that society wants from its colleges and universities. It is not clear that one system -- the traditional tenure track -- is best. But it is also not clear that the path toward an increasingly temporary and contingent faculty is necessarily better. If we have succeeded in provoking a deeper -- yet more nuanced -- look at how the production of knowledge, the teaching and learning process in undergraduate education, and the application of knowledge to society's problems may best be conducted by the most talented and most committed minds, we will have taken one step in the right direction.

... the effectiveness and validity of higher education depends on what faculty do, how their work and careers are constructed, and whether they can achieve socially important goals. The traditions of shared governance, integrated curriculum, and intellectual freedom are more difficult to preserve when faculty are more fragmented and transient.

Endnotes

[1] The term, "part-time" faculty will refer to individuals appointed to teach courses and whose employment is on some basis other than a full-time contract. Sometimes referred to as "adjunct" faculty, whose employment is typically long-term, but part-time, this group also includes temporary hires who teach as substitutes, as "fill-in" appointments, or as on-call instructors whose employment depends on adequate enrollment in courses. It does not refer to graduate teaching assistants, nor to faculty appointed to full-time positions without eligibility for tenure. The latter group are commonly referred to as "temporary" faculty. But terminology varies, making it difficult in some cases to define clearly who may be included in a generalization and who may not. The data in this report are drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics' National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) conducted in the fall of 1992. Respondents to the survey self-reported their full- or part-time status.

[2] We caution against the assumption that part-time faculty teach intermittently, irregularly, or only for brief periods. They averaged 6.3 years in their teaching jobs in 1992, and appear -- on the whole -- to be a stable, loyal, and committed work force. (See also Gappa and Leslie, 1993.)

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